

Swiss voters approved new restrictions on immigration in a referendum held in February 2014, with a narrow majority backing a proposal promoted by the right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP). The proposal included the reintroduction of quotas for foreign workers and required the government to renegotiate a bilateral accord with the European Union (EU) on the movement of labor. Most business groups and parliamentary parties had opposed the initiative, noting the reliance of certain sectors of the economy on foreign workers. The initiative was introduced amid an environment of concern about immigration rates, which have increased the general population by about 77,000 annually in recent years.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 39 / 40 [Key]

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The constitution provides for a Federal Assembly with two directly elected chambers: the 46-member Council of States (in which each canton has two members and each half-canton has one) and the 200-member National Council. All lawmakers serve four-year terms. The Federal Council (cabinet) is a seven-person executive council, with each member elected by the Federal Assembly. The presidency is largely ceremonial and rotates annually among the Federal Council's members.

The 2011 federal elections saw a modest strengthening of the political center in Switzerland. The right-wing SVP, while still the leading party, lost seats in the National Council for the first time since 1975, retaining 54 seats—8 fewer than it had won in 2007. The Social Democratic Party (SPS) won 46 seats, the Free Democratic Party (FDP) took 30 seats, and the Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP) captured 28 seats. Seven smaller parties also gained representation. In a June 2013 referendum, voters rejected a proposal backed by the SVP to hold direct elections for Federal Council members.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Political parties are free to form and operate. The political system is extremely stable—a coalition of the same four parties (or their precursors) has been governing since 1959. By common agreement, since 2008 the Federal Council has been comprised of two members each from the SVP, the SPS, and the FDP, and one member from CVP.

Restrictive citizenship laws and procedures tend to exclude many immigrants and their family members in successive generations from political participation.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

Swiss governance is characterized by decentralization. The 26 cantons have significant control over economic and social policy, with the federal government's powers largely limited to foreign affairs and some economic matters. Referendums, which are used extensively, are mandatory for any amendments to

the federal constitution, the joining of international organizations, or major changes to federal laws.

The government is free from pervasive corruption. Switzerland was ranked 5 out of 175 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index.

In 2013, Switzerland signed an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) convention against tax evasion, in which states pledge to share information for tax enforcement. As the world's largest offshore financial center, however, Switzerland has been criticized for failing to comply with recommended international norms on preventing tax evasion, money laundering, and the financing of terrorism. Credit Suisse, the second-largest Swiss bank, pleaded guilty in 2014 to conspiracy to assist tax evasion by U.S. citizens, a criminal charge brought by U.S. prosecutors. The bank agreed to pay more than \$2.5 billion in penalties, but it was not required to turn over the names of its clients.

Civil Liberties: 57 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

Freedom of speech is guaranteed by the constitution. Switzerland has a free media environment, although the state-owned Swiss Broadcasting Corporation dominates the broadcast market. Consolidation of newspaper ownership in large media conglomerates has forced the closure of some small and local newspapers. The law penalizes public incitement to racial hatred or discrimination as well as denial of crimes against humanity. The government does not restrict access to the internet.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution, and most cantons support one or more churches. The country is roughly split between Roman Catholics and Protestants, although some 400,000 Muslims form the largest non-Christian minority, at about 5 percent of the population. In a November 2009 referendum, voters approved a ban on the future construction of minarets on mosques. In 2013, the Italian-speaking southern canton of Ticino became the first to approve a ban on face-covering veils in public spaces, after the parliament rejected a proposed ban in 2012.

In October 2014, the Federal Council announced a ban on membership in the Islamic State (IS) militant group, and barred activities including propaganda, fund-raising, and recruitment for IS. Violators of the ban can face up to three years in prison. Swiss citizens who travel abroad to fight with the group may be subject to prosecution upon return.

Most public schools provide religious education, depending on the predominant creed in the canton. Religion classes are mandatory in some schools, although waivers are regularly granted upon request. The government respects academic freedom.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are protected by the constitution. The right to collective bargaining is respected, and approximately 16 percent of the workforce is unionized. In a May 2014 referendum, 76 percent of voters rejected a proposal, backed by labor unions, to institute a minimum wage of 22 Swiss francs (\$25) an hour, which would have been the highest in the world.

F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16

The judiciary is independent, and the rule of law prevails in civil and criminal matters. Most judicial decisions are made at the cantonal level. The federal Supreme Court is empowered to review cantonal court decisions when they pertain to federal law. Some incidents of police discrimination and excessive use of force have been documented. Conditions in prisons and detention centers generally meet international standards, and the Swiss government permits visits by independent observers.

According to the government, 23,765 people applied for asylum in Switzerland in 2014, an increase of 11 percent from 2013. In a June 2013 referendum, about 80 percent of voters approved a proposal to tighten asylum laws. In August 2014, a group of asylum seekers began protesting the increasing use of underground nuclear fallout shelters as housing for asylum seekers in several Swiss cantons.

In the February 2014 referendum, 50.3 percent of voters supported a proposal to further increase restrictions on immigration. The result obliges the government to act within three years to impose new quotas on foreign workers and renegotiate labor market agreements with the EU. It also requires employers to give preference to Swiss citizens in hiring, and restricts immigrants' rights to welfare benefits. In a November referendum, voters rejected a proposal by an environmentalist group to cap the annual number of new immigrants at 0.2 percent of the population.

The rights of cultural, religious, and linguistic minorities are legally protected, but minority groups—especially those of African and Central European descent, as well as Roma—face increasing societal discrimination. A September 2014 report by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance stated that Switzerland lacks effective legislation to deal with racism and homophobia.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

Women were only granted universal suffrage at the federal level in 1971, and the half-canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden denied women the right to vote until 1990. In the 2011 elections, 59 women were elected to the National Council, and 9 to the Council of States. The constitution guarantees men and women equal pay for equal work, but pay differentials remain. Switzerland was ranked 11 out of 142 countries surveyed in the World Economic Forum's 2014 Gender Gap Report, which analyzes equality in the division of resources and opportunities between men and women. In a February 2014 referendum, Swiss voters rejected a proposal by Christian conservatives to remove coverage for abortions from public health insurance.

In a 2005 referendum, voters approved same-sex civil unions. Recognized since 2007, these unions grant many of the legal rights of marriage, with the exception of adoption. In December 2012, the National Council passed a bill allowing members of same-sex unions to adopt the children of their partners.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

Full Methodology